

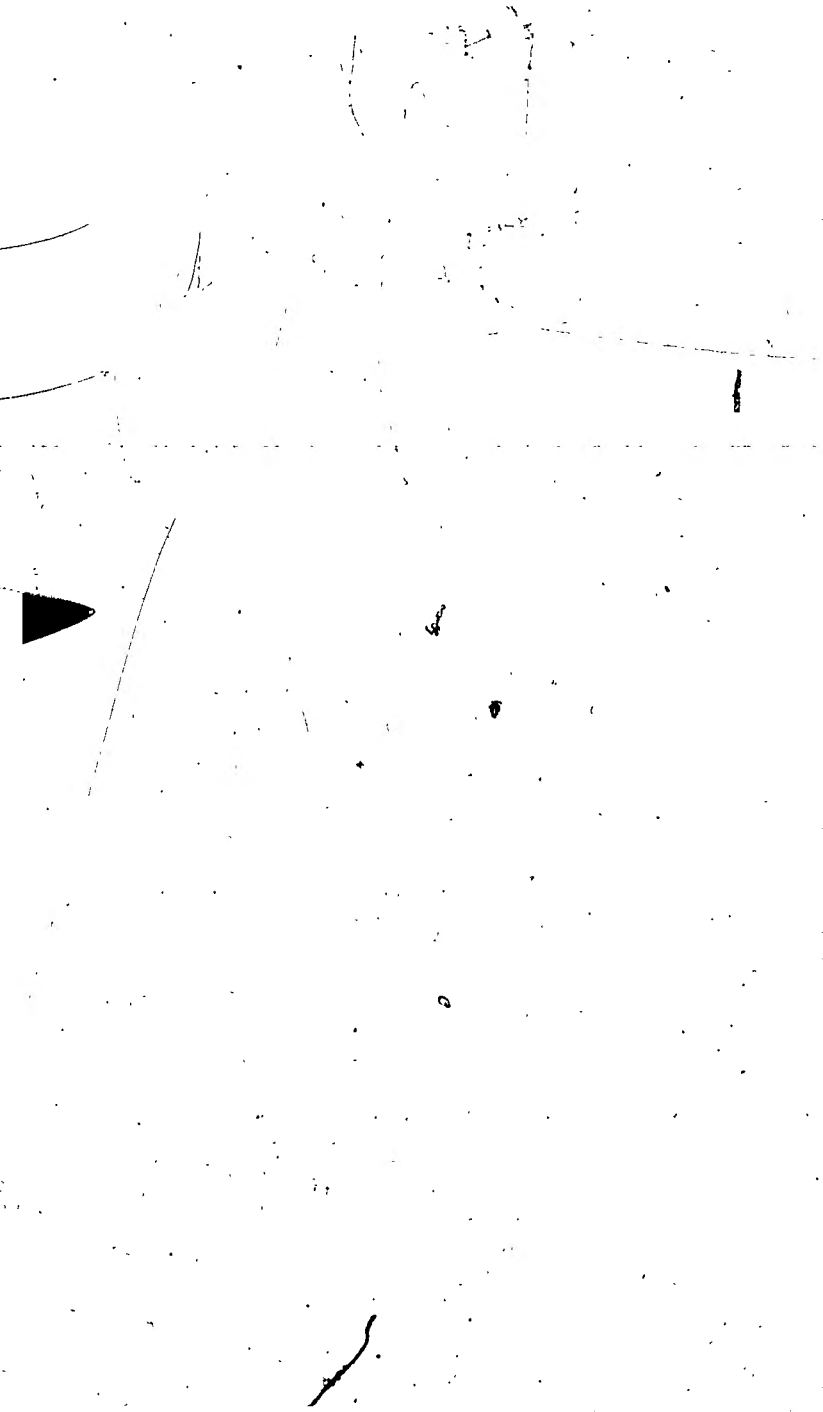
LANDFALL

CECIL FRANCIS LLOYD



19299
1212

LANDFALL



LANDFALL

The Collected Poems

of

CECIL FRANCIS LLOYD



THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO

17
COPYRIGHT, CANADA, 1935, BY
THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA
BY THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

106041

TO THE MEMORY OF MY WIFE

A LOYAL COMRADE IN MANY A HARD-FOUGHT BATTLE AND
A GAY COMPANION IN MANY A WILD ADVENTURE
OF THE SPIRIT, THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

Victory comes late,
And is held low to freezing lips
Too rapt with frost
To take it.

—Emily Dickinson

FOREWORD

I HAVE been asked to write, in about two hundred words, a foreword for this little volume of poems. I am reminded of the reply of the Irishman to the nervous young speaker: What shall I speak about? Speak about a minute and sit down. Art is the deliberate expression of an idea or an emotion in some significant medium. All that was deliberate in the production of these poems was the act of setting them down; they came to me out of the blue. There was often a little deliberate polishing of this or that line, but the thing, in the main, just grewed, like Topsy. Out walking, gardening, reading or day-dreaming, a line or a phrase would come into my head to be followed by the whole poem. One of the poems in this book that dissatisfies me least, the Helen sonnet, came into my head while I was cleaning stove-pipes in the backyard on nearly the vilest March day I can remember. No, I never deliberately sat down to write a poem.

I have long held with Goethe that a poet should be aware of most of the ideas current in his time; that his work will have value in proportion to his awareness and be vitiated by any lack of it. I think those who read my poems will discover that I have tried to keep in touch with the main lines followed by the thought of my time. The roughneck school of

poets, well represented in this country, profess to despise books and cloistered writers. Now since books are the fruit of other men's experience, despising them is very like despising one's neighbours, a most undemocratic thing to do. As for cloistered poets, they often exhibit an astonishing range. Emily Dickinson may be called a cloistered poet: see Beard, *Rise of the American Civilization*, but she certainly "charted out the empyreal air"; if any poet of the roughneck school has ever risen more than three hedgerows high, I am not aware of it.

A poem should have two kinds of beauty, beauty of thought and beauty of form. I think some of the poems in this volume will satisfy both those conditions. I have tried no metrical experiments, having neither time nor taste for that sort of thing. If I have deviated in one or two places from the regular form, I am prepared to justify it. In conclusion, if Matthew Arnold was right when he asserted that only what the author enjoyed creating will give pleasure, then these poems ought to please, for I certainly enjoyed doing them.

CECIL FRANCIS LLOYD.

IVY LODGE,
WINNIPEG,
April 8th, 1935.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD	vii
THE GIRL IN THE STORE	1
REINCARNATION	1
RELEASE	2
TRUTH	3
FRATER AVE	3
THE QUEST	4
HER GRAVE	5
THE REASON	5
LAST POST	6
MUTATION	6
ROSE	7
TO SPOT	8
SLEEP	8
IMMORTALITY	9
THE MYSTIC	9
MARCH WINDS	10

	PAGE
THE CONVENT	11
TO MARY WEBB	11
THE ARTIST	12
THE POET	13
LINES FOR ANY CENOTAPH TO THE MEN WHO FELL IN THE WAR	13
HELEN	14
REST	14
SERVICE	15
NAPOLEON	16
TO DONN BYRNE	17
ARMISTICE DAY, 1928	17
GROWTH	18
THE MESSAGE	19
MY LADY	19
THE CRUSADER	20
THE STAR	22
THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN	23
AN AUGUST EVENING ON VICTOR STREET, 1926	26
DUALITY	26
TO MARJORIE PICKTHALL	27

	PAGE
IN MEMORIAM: TO THOMAS HARDY	28
TO MAUD	30
EARTHBOUND	30
SUNSET	31
SUMMER PASSES	32
REMEMBRANCE	33
EXILE	34
SEPARATION	35
STARLIGHT	36
THE FIGHTER	37
TO AN OLD WOMAN DYING IN HER SLEEP	38
TO IVY ON HER BIRTHDAY	39
BALLADE OF LIFE AND DEATH	39
MOONRISE	40
GOOD-BYE	41
TO JOSEPHINE ON HER THIRD ST. VALENTINE'S DAY	42
TO JOSEPHINE, AGED THREE	43
TO THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER OF WESTMINSTER	44
THE ANSWER	45
REVELATION	45
WHITE MAGIC	46
QUESTION	47

LANDFALL

THE GIRL IN THE STORE

FAIR girl, if one who must in beauty find
Hints of a lordlier nature than we know,
A finer flower to which the soul may grow
When flesh has been subdued by purer mind,
Should offer you this rose of verse, be kind;
Keep it as you might keep a flower: I owe
You thus much thanks for beauty you bestow,
Unconscious of your gift, for use designed.
Walking one April morning in a wood,
I saw, amid tall plants of earthy grain,
One flower of such ethereal purity
That, as by God revealed, I understood
Why just to see some faces is pure gain;
Through them we touch the race that yet may
be.

REINCARNATION

ONE died in battle and his flesh
Was moistened by the rain,
Till blue and sweet the violets sprang,
Wild beauty born of pain.

Famine consumed one and his dust
Was blown where? no man knows:
A passing bird let fall a seed,
The dust became a rose.

God of our fathers, is it true
That we must come to this;
Our finest thoughts to nothingness,
To dust-love's bravest kiss?

For should I not know that I am
Beauty, though beauty be
Bread of my soul, pray tell me what
Will beauty mean to me?

RELEASE

WHEN I become the thing that fools despise,
And, dust to dust, be something more than
words,
And all the clean delight of ears and eyes
In Protean beauty and the songs of birds
Be an old dusty volume, laid away
In the vast archives of forgotten races,
Where the brave rose of passionate yesterday
Still lends a hectic glow to spectral faces:
Then may my Father's many mansions be
Familiar to my feet as trails long known,
And apprehension in an instant see
What three score years and ten had never shown.
Oft from a child we take that we may give,
So, losing life, we then may truly live.

TRUTH

NO heavier lies the everlasting snow
On Alps or Andes than upon my tongue
The pain of silence, yet I surely know
The vast abyss whence all great words have
sprung.

If I should lay a steady hand in yours
And to the passion of your words reply
With just a syllable, the thing endures
Beyond the steadfast beauty of the sky.
And as the tenderness of dawn and eve
Turns the suspended avalanche to gold,
I would that for your sake you should believe
My heart is warm although my words are cold.
Lacking the facile power of easy breath,
For life, I give you love, that fears no death.

FRATER AVE

I HAD two friends, the one was old,
The other young and gay,
The one was sky when skies were gold,
The other earth when grey.

Now golden skies are often sad,
Upon October eyes,
The greyest earth may well be glad
Beneath the young May leaves.

One friend went west when spring was sweet
And one when skies were brown;
If they and I should ever meet
'Twill be in Dancing Town.

THE QUEST

I SOUGHT Him in the labyrinth of the creeds,
Where unbelievers deftly pray by rote;
Along dim aisles where cunning splendour leads
To ancient altars, from all gods remote.
I wandered over land and over sea,
To kneel all night where hoary olives fling
A shade more heavy than the stones, but He
I sought for came not any hope to bring.
Dawn touched the Holy City with her hand,
Light as a mother's when she rocks her child:
Amid the wild flowers of that sacred land
I walked, to disappointment reconciled.
Then came this word my travail to reward,
Within your heart you still may find your Lord.

HER GRAVE

JUST where the sunbeams sloping to the west
Turn the grass rosy at the hour of rest,
Beside a sinuous brook that winds about,
With sweeping movements, like a dappled trout,
Where the first violets lift their blue in spring
And on May morns the earliest robins sing:
Lies one to whom the sunrise on the snow,
The tender beauty of the afterglow,
A child's small hand imploring aid to pass,
With tottering footsteps, o'er the tangled grass,
The northern-lights, a crocus in the sod,
Were all as lovely as the face of God.

THE REASON

(August 4th, 1914)

AS I went out to plow I heard one say,
The world is darkened by an evil thing;
Freedom is threatened by a lawless king,
Who would subdue her wholly to his sway.
All the delightful things we love to-day,
The peace of home, the music of the spring,
When Life to Beauty brings her offering,
Should this man's sword prevail will pass away.
I left my team, saying the land could wait,
Freedom is more than life; if might is right
Then God's the devil: never cared what fate
Might spring to meet me in the coming fight.
I saw my brother's children on the gate,
A-swing and singing in the spreading light.

LAST POST

LO, where a passionate splendour of pure flame
Heralds the day's release
From the tumultuous present's stormy claim
Into a boundless peace.

Clear as a robin's song through dripping leaves,
After a night of storm,
In solemn tones the plaintive bugle grieves
Above each flag-draped form.

Silence, O haunting bugle, for no cry
Of grief or pain may bring
One passionate heart throb from the dead who lie,
Deaf to the voice of spring.

The day dies and the eerie wind of night
Moans mournfully and low
Along that pathway of the fading light,
The way we all must go.

MUTATION

I WANDERED on the hillside
Upon a night in June,
I saw the fairies dancing
Beneath a crescent moon;
—I heard their merry laughter
That straight recalled to me
The flower-sweet tunes that linger
In halls of memory.

I wandered by the seaside,
Where the billows fall,
Above the breakers' thunder
Rang clear the seamew's call;
And as its haunting cadence
Across the foam was flung,
Returned to me the happy days
When you and I were young.

I wandered by the brookside
In autumn of the year,
When through the ruddy maples
The winds of winter stir;
The bitter winds that visit us
When leaf and blossom flee;
Too soon, O friend of springtime,
They'll breathe on you and me.

ROSE

DAINTY rose, on jewelled spray,
Nodding slow at break of day;
Summer hastens fast away,
Dainty rose, you may not stay:
While you may, then, drink the dew,
Dream the sun was made for you.

Note that dust from whence you spring,
Once it too could pleasure bring,
Blithely dance and laugh and sing,
Wave a fan or please a king:
Is she dust alone, my Rose?
Only God who made her knows.

TO SPOT

O YOU were the friend of my friend indeed,
In those days when she was alive and gay,
With a wag of the paws you used to plead
For water, cheese or a chance to play.
I can see you tug at her skirts to go
For your evening run in the afterglow.

Now I wake in the night and listen long
For the patter of paws across the floor,
For that bark, as sweet to my ear as song,
And the wee nose pushing my bedroom door:
O friend of my friend, I must stumble on,
But the world is desolate now you're gone.

SLEEP

SLEEP to my cradle came, when I was young,
Sweet as a rose leaf drifting down the wind;
Hushed the insistent babble of my tongue
And laid a wood-pool's stillness on my mind.
Sleep came to me a-down the vale of youth,
A gentle moth adrift on starry wings,
And my fierce greed for joy, adventure, truth,
Surrendered to the peace oblivion brings.
Sleep came to me when I was growing old,
A lady with a poppy in her hand;
Nor eating cares nor troubles manifold
That blossom's subtle fragrance could withstand.
Soon a more potent anodyne will steep
My brain in God's best gift, unbroken sleep.

IMMORTALITY

THEY married wit and beauty

All on a summer day:

Wit got the best of beauty

And stole her rose away.

Beauty nursed her children

While wit got his reward

In coin, wine and laughter,

Till he became a lord.

They buried wit and beauty

All on an autumn morn:

Flocks of screaming blackbirds

Circled o'er the corn.

Now wit is long forgotten

But 'neath the summer moon,

Above the grave of beauty,

You'll find a rose in June.

THE MYSTIC

MINE is a land of rare delights

My neighbours never see;

Yon cloud that rides the evening wind,

Is more than cloud to me.

The weed that hides the ruined fane,

Each unregarded clod,

Are footprints of the Infinite,

To lead me to my God.

Not mine the worldling's sensual joy,
• Brave heights my soul has known;
From icy crags of thought I hear
Celestial trumpets blown.
Pure truth, too cold for lips of flesh,
To me is bread divine;
The blood of beauty's fadeless rose
My sacramental wine.

MARCH WINDS

I HEAR enormous noises in the night
Pass through the house to die into the dark;
Setting my wild heart shuddering with fright,
Like some old tale of witch or goblin. Hark!
Surely that was a foot upon the floor,
And hark again, a dreadful moan of pain:
A ghostly hand is troubling my door,
That was a sigh that passed, I heard it plain.
Primeval terrors darkly stir along
The current of my blood and lift my hair.
Around my bed mysterious faces throng,
Demonic, ah, but one of them is fair:
She smiles at me, I'll slumber like a child,
Though on the plains the winds of March blow wild.

THE CONVENT

THIS is the house where flesh grown intimate
With spirit, sanctifies the dross of earth;
While the proud senses, like attendants, wait
On temperate Contemplation, foe to mirth.
Here reverend age and grave austerity,
Mellowed by endless prayer, by thought refined,
Repress, with no ill-meant severity,
The softer graces of the worldly mind.
But one fair maid, with still unfurrowed brow,
Sweet eyes that half-remember silk and gold,
Pale blossoms fragrant on an apple bough,
A boyish glance, half bashful and half bold,
May on some April eve, when prayers are done,
Wish, for a moment, she were not a nun.

TO MARY WEBB

WELCOME, kindred spirit, searching eye and
quiet mind;
Well you know the woodland paths, haunted by the
wind,
Where the bee, in golden velvet, weds the rose in
June,
And the rain drips sadly through an autumn
afternoon.

Through your eyes I see again, misty, far withdrawn,
The blue lift of my Malverns in the gentle April
dawn:

In your limpid notes I catch the impassioned strain
Of a thrush in Mother's garden, singing in the rain.

THE ARTIST

GREATLY I suffered, greatly too have sinned;
Something men owe me, little call I mine.

My flesh has felt the knife of every wind,

Men I have slain, have warmed my heart with
wine.

My soul has drained the sweetness from white arms,

Delicate breasts, lips' honeyed loveliness,

Virgil's immortal music, the cool charms

Of April eves, chaste dawn's divine caress.

Out of the muck and splendour of my days

Jewels I wrought and polished lovingly:

Sweet Christ, me save; to you be all the praise,

If aught I fashioned shall remembered be,

To honour Beauty, golden maid, whose face

Reveals to me God's glory and his grace.

THE POET

A QUIET man who walked an endless round
Of tedious days, or so it seemed to be
To those who never noticed his profound
Glance of discernment flash out suddenly
Upon the little world whose passing dust
Powdered his jacket with a film of grey:
Men deemed him unimportant for no gust
Of lusty fortune ever blew his way.
His brown-eyed wife was gentle as the dew,
Still as the mouse that sees the cat go by:
One morning when the dawn was breaking through
The curtains of her room he watched her die.
Then he died, long ago; now men rehearse
The limpid music of his homely verse.

LINES FOR ANY CENOTAPH TO THE MEN WHO FELL IN THE WAR.

THIS to remind you as to work or play,
Gay or in sombre mood, you pass this way,
That far from here, in pain and misery,
We passed from time into eternity.
This stone will crumble, iron rust, but men,
Their deeds remembered, seem to live again.
Vain are these honours, vain were all our pains,
If to destroy your children war remains.

HELEN

WHEN Death claimed Helen of the golden hair,
An awe-struck whisper passed, beauty is dead:
Even the milk-white almond blossoms shed
Into the pool's translucence seemed less fair
Than when the glory of the queen was there.
Men eyed the curves of many a lovely head,
And listened, heart-sick, to the lightfoot tread
Of buoyant youth, but all the world was bare.
Years passed, then travellers in distant lands
Caught in a sunset's splendour or the rose
Of dawn, a hint that only memory gives:
Again they saw the cool uplifted hands
Hover above the brow's divine repose,
And with a sudden thrill cried, Helen lives.

REST

I KNOW a lonely little lake
Inviting one to rest;
The shadow of a sleeping cloud
Falls darkly on its breast,
Until at eve a homing wind
Runs swiftly to the west.

I know an orchard slumbrous,
With trees gnarled and old;
And at its foot a tiny brook,
With water pure and cold;
The sheep pace by it silently,
Returning from the fold.

I know an unfrequented road,
Leading from town to town,
It passes by that orchard sweet,
Gently winding down,
Past a little schoolhouse, red,
And a farmhouse brown.

It is not to the farmhouse quaint
Nor to the schoolhouse trim,
Nor even to the little brook,
Shadow-cool and dim,
That I would go with palsied head
And battle-wearied limb.

I'd seek that lonely little lake,
There in a boat I'd lie
And wait till the transfigured clouds
Burned in the evening sky,
Then the wind that blows to Avalon
Would come nor pass me by.

SERVICE

I DO desire that one whose brow was bound
With cruel thorns should lay some task on me;
The meanest in His temple to be found,
With death for fee.

O not that at the altar I may eat
The body's bread, there would I take my stand;
But that in some vile shed, some evil street,
Thy healing hand

I may discern in His, who sedulous
To heal the outcast, looks for no reward;
O let me serve Him faithfully and thus,
Draw near Thee, Lord.

NAPOLEON

GLORY and he were born in the same hour
And died together, for no other hand
Than his could wield the thunder or command
Battle's creative lightning to devour,
Not hosts alone, the very stones of power
On which old thrones reposed: no king could stand
Against him till a task too vastly planned
Crumbled him like a cannon-shattered tower.
'Twas when he passed into the realm of dream,
Amid hot Spanish wastes and Russian snows,
Left the good earth, ignored the steady gleam
Of calculable fact, that there arose
The wind that drove him down the bitter stream
To that dark gulf a fallen monarch knows.

TO DONN BYRNE

THE fairest flower has ever briefest life,
The brightest day becomes too quickly old;
The sky-aspiring flame of worthy strife
Drops into ashes and grows sudden cold.
The light that on the mountain tops doth burn
Flies the approach of ever-greedy night:
All lovely things too early must return
To earth, fair victims of her moody spite.
But who would not far rather be a rose,
One honeyed hour of summer's golden prime,
Than the dull lichen that unheeded grows
On tombstones, even to the end of time?
Better be beauty for an hour than be
Dullness and dust for all eternity.

ARMISTICE DAY, 1928

THE larks sing high in the whitening morn,
The swallows glide through the afterglow;
Patient, in August, the ripening corn
Feeds on the passions of long ago:
Ten years gone, the dead lie still,
Beside the river and over the hill.

The sword is rust that flamed so bright
In the April dawn on Vimy ridge;
The peasant sees in the pale moonlight
A ghostly column on Fresnoy bridge,
With faces turned to the quiet sky;
He crosses himself as the dead go by.

Brightly as ever the poppies run
Through the bearded barley, tall and thick;
Though silent are bugle, fife and gun,
The quick who were dead again are quick:
Hatred to beauty by death transformed,
Clothes the slope where the bayonets swarmed.

Man is foolish but Nature wise;
Ever he troubles her patient face,
Till she lays her hand on his fevered eyes,
Drawing him down to her warm embrace.
Ten years gone, we count the cost,
But who dare say that the dead men lost?

GROWTH

DEATH has no power to give that faith the lie
We owe to dust that once was hands and eyes,
Brave heart and all the beauty lovers prize.
For, like the pale forget-me-nots that die,
Trampled beneath November's bitter sky,
Man's flesh is a poor blossom that defies
Death's frost a summer day or two then hies
To earth's strong hands to be remade thereby.
We crush the flower that perfume may remain
When Love's sweet body in the earth is laid.
One feels along the blood and in the brain
A new communion, greatly unafraid
Of little Death and all his goblin train.
For love's enlargement body's death has paid.

THE MESSAGE

HIGH through the silvery twilight soared the tower,

Clean as a sword's bright edge and strong as love.

A sudden flight of sound proclaimed the hour;

The rose of evening lingered far above.

Skyward the deep-based portal leaped like flame,

Grace and the power of patient thought were there,

And craftsmanship, content without a name

To find its rich reward for toil in prayer.

Out of the deepening shadow silently,

A figure stole, in cowl and corded gown:

The ascetic lips moved not, yet gave to me

This searching message from the ancient town:

How once we built for love, these stones can tell;

For gain or glory see ye build as well.

MY LADY

SHE walks amid the noisy crowd

And yet alone she seems;

A dainty creature, shy, not proud,

Like maiden seen in dreams

Her eyes are bright as love's own star,

Brown pools of laughter, deep;

Her thoughts as pure as lilies are

And calm as folded sheep.

This is no heathen goddess, bold,
Rich-hued as Samian wine,
With sky-blue eyes and hair of gold,
Like ore from India's mine.
She is my lady of delight,
Made for all homely ways;
For sunny rooms by love made bright,
Where childish laughter strays.

No pagan dame with jewelled zone,
Not Venus' self; shall e'er
Usurp my lovely lady's throne,
Her crown of glory wear:
She is my lady of delight,
Whom God in mercy keep;
Her thoughts, as moonlit lilies white,
Are calm as folded sheep.

THE CRUSADER

SHEATHED broadsword by his side,
Sword upon his breast,
Battles over long ago,
Lies the Knight at rest;
In the land he fought to save
From the Infidel;
Waiteth for the judgment peal,
Sleepeth long and well.

Sleepeth well yet hears the crowd
Pass the old church door,
Women's dresses, little feet,
Rustle on the floor.
How I love to think, sometimes,
That the grim lips smile
As a boy's clear treble floats
Sweetly down the aisle.

For the Knight was once a boy,
Sang in English choir,
Knew the lure of laughing eyes,
Felt his heart on fire,
Across the dewy fields.
Battle trumpets rang,
While his father's iron towers
Heard the armour clang.

Ah, I know the grey dust stirred,
Felt the battle flame,
As adown Jerusalem's streets
England's legions came.
Flash of lance and toss of plume,
Muttered roll of drum;
Now the long crusade is o'er,
Allenby has come.

Far away in English lanes
English roses bloom;
Mellow English sunlight falls
On a stately tomb;
But the Knight-as quiet sleeps
'Neath Jerusalem's sod;
Calmly, as becomes the brave,
Rest, O knight of God.

THE STAR

AN arrowy splendour floods the brightening blue,
Shaming the pale ghost of the setting moon:
It burns in every pendent globe of dew
That the too ardent sun will gather soon.
Noon, and the fervid day no trace retains
Of the keen herald that proclaimed its birth:
Only an image in the mind remains
Of glory that has passed away from earth.
Then comes a moment at the sundown's edge
When falls a sudden peace on land and sea:
The rose, divided by one fiery wedge,
Thrills on the threshold of eternity.
Rejoice my heart, for, splendidly revealed,
Evening restores the beauty noon concealed.

THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

YOU learned Rabbis ask me what I know
Touching my resurrection from the dead?
Well, I can hardly tell; words fail me here.
The thing is strange; thus much I know, I died,
And you, yourselves, can see I am alive
While I am sure I never felt so well:
My step seems lighter than it used to be,
Redder my lips. I scarcely can explain
Just how I feel,—Like a young bird, I think,
When first it finds that wings were given to aid
The body, earth-bound else, to soar above
The fields, the very clouds, to wander free
Through the warm, sunlit wash of golden air,
Buoyant and joyous. I have often heard
How great Elisha raised a young child once.
Perhaps the mighty Rabbi who raised me
Was great Elisha's self. What say you, Sirs?
Enough for me, I died and am alive,
A little girl who numbers just twelve years,
One who has scarce done playing with her dolls,
Still cries at nights when left alone in the dark,
Has fancies that she cannot put in words,
And likes to cuddle close to mother's breast,
Listen to fairy tales and gather flowers.
I do not know your law, just one crude fact,
The Rabbi gave me life, I love Him well.
You who are men, old, wise and reverend,
Must say who the good Rabbi is, and how
He did the thing; the fact's enough for me.

How did I come to die? am I a leech?
I only know the weather was too hot:
One moment my poor body felt like flame
When the hand touches it, the next a chill
Shook me as cold winds shake the withered reeds
Along the stream's dry bed in winter-time.
Three days I tossed, moaning in agony,
Nor found I in my playthings joy at all.
Then the ripe melon's cool, sweet, crimson pulp,
I love in health, grew bitter to my taste.
I cried for naught save water, water, ay,
Cold water for my lips were dry and hot.
There came a time the heat grew less intense,
I felt so tired I could not keep awake,
Saw through a mist the faces round my bed,
Drew one hand, thus, across my eyes to clear
The mist away, so slept. You say I died.
Dreamless my sleep in health, then were they dreams
That brought familiar things before my sight
In that strange country, O so wonderful,
Where were no shadows, only light and calm?
No pain I felt, only a little tired.
If dream it were, I dreamed my sister came—
You know our Rachel, she who died last June,
My tall, fair sister with the soft fawn eyes,
Lips like pomegranate pulp, rich, ripe and red,
And thick black tresses that I loved to braid.
I saw her plainly as I see this hall,
Your faces, that tall soldier over there,
Or any other object; I am sure
I felt her soft, warm arms about my waist
And heard her voice: you know our Rachel's voice

Was softer than a dove's coo, when the white
Dawn breaks and sleepy children hear the sound,
The liquid murmur, with still drowsy ears.
What happened next? Well, Sirs, I've often heard
My mother's voice coming, or so it seemed,
From far away, say, "Zillah, my beloved,
'Tis time to wake, get up, my baby, come,
Soft, rosy dawn light has awaked the rose.
Up, I have golden honey, new-drawn milk
And little girls must breakfast ere go play."
Just so it seemed that in that sleep, called death,
Above my sister's voice I heard a voice
Saying: "Talitha Cumi," then a hand,
Tender and warm as mother's, took my own.
As in the morning I awake from sleep,
Sit up in bed and rub my eyes and yawn,
So, in a moment, I sat bolt upright,
Saw mother, father, three strange bearded men,
And Him, the great tall Rabbi, with the eyes
That seemed to talk as Rachel's eyes did once.
He smiled at me, I felt that all was well.
He's bad? I only know that He is fair,
With hair and beard one ruddy flame of gold.
He spoke to those about me:—"Give her meat."
Then smiled at me again, so left the room.
There now, I've told my story, all, I think,
That I can tell or you would care to hear.
You're wise, my seniors, and I have respect
For all of you, your learning and your place.
But I will not believe the Rabbi's bad.
If He's not God indeed He's God to me.

AN AUGUST EVENING ON VICTOR STREET, 1926

GENTLE as rain a softened splendour falls
Upon hot streets where tired children play,
And all the feverish voices of the day
Die into silence, as along the walls
Shadows creep, an anxious mother calls
A grubby tot who would delight to stay
And watch the game, he slowly turns away,
Then turns again to watch the flying balls.
The dusty street becomes a magic door
Open on endless avenues of light,
Leading to some sequestered country o'er
Which beauty reigns with an unchallenged right.
A lean old cat beside the corner store,
Watches the sparrows gathering for the night.

DUALITY

NIGHT, and the glory of the stars above me
And all the world away;
Clouds, and the surging power of winds around me,
And I as free as they.
Free, on the bold brow of this lonely mountain,
Moonlight around me thrown;
Far above earth and all its fierce contentions
And, save for God, alone.

Alone with things that know not mortal sorrow
And would not care if we
Were hurled, like light, through interstellar spaces,
Throughout eternity.
Hark faint, far off, I catch the sound of singing,
The warm breath of the loam;
I see beneath me in the shadowy valley
The light that calls me home.

Ah, man, the earth-born, needs the warm embraces
And rich delights of earth,
An arm of flesh to stay his feet from falling,
Laughter and homely mirth.
But should I lay aside this mortal vesture,
Become immortal mind,
Then I, perhaps, may call a star my brother,
And the great winds my kind.

TO MARJORIE PICKTHALL

COMETH the night? Not yet, not yet.
Caught in the young day's fiery net,
The morning star on heaven's blue hill
Thrones its diminished splendour still.
To greet the wild embrace of light,
In the hushed wood the violet shy
Opens an azure-shadowed eye;
All things refute that dreadful cry,
"Cometh the night."

Cometh the night ere blaze of noon?
Dear God, it is too soon, too soon;
The moon's pale plumes are never spread
O'er that dark road down which the dead,
Regretful, wing unpitied flight.
Silent the singer but the song
Remains for men to cherish long;
Words of immortal beauty, strong
As God who ruleth night.

Cometh the night and welcome too,
Perchance, to one who never drew
Delight from day's too bold regard:
Feet which the thorns of life have scarred
Are not unthankful for surcease
Of wandering in futile quest
Of beauty, fleet and unpossessed,
Save for a moment; night is best,
Night and peace.

IN MEMORIAM: TO THOMAS HARDY

HIS heart was formed of Wessex mold
And darkly in his veins there ran
An ancient current, stern and cold,
That marks the sombre Wessex man.

But there was something kindly too,
And light and laughter both were sweet
To one whose steps in childhood knew
Where greenwood tree and sunbeam meet.

They've laid his dust where sage and king
Beneath the minister's stones repose;
But from his heart each June will spring
The sweetness of a Wessex rose.

For him the lonely thrush will call,
From shivering bough on moonlit eves;
For him the rabbit's footstep fall
More gently 'mid the scurrying leaves.

Perchance the lambs may see him pass,
Some cold March night along the downs,
Grey as the frozen churchyard grass,
To walk the sleepy market towns.

Perchance o'er solemn Egdon Heath
His questing spirit still will brood,
When heaven above and earth beneath
Are both one darkling solitude.

But if from conscious being free,
Absorbed in God's creative breast,
The man we love has ceased to be,
Who dares to say it is not best?

TO MAUD

WHEN the dead sun shall fold his burning wings
And earth be but a dream of yesterday;
Sweet as remembered beauty of dead springs,
Clothing the white austerity of May,
The clinging fragrance of your love shall be,
In wintry hours, the breath of life to me.

EARTHBOUND

WHEN the great silence comes and, tremblingly,
I leave the confines of this solid land,
Feel the last touch of a warm earthly hand,
And float upon the viewless ether, free
At last from all earth's shifting pageantry:
Beyond the gloom by Death's grey pinions fanned,
I may see waves break on a sunlit strand
And hear the murmur of the eternal sea.
O fair may be that sunny land of bliss
Where God the weary soul from evil shields;
Yet, howsoever bright it be, I'll miss
The drift of grey rain o'er the summer fields,
Voices of children, flowers and love's fierce kiss
And all the beauty bounteous autumn yields.

SUNSET

THE lark has found her nest amid the clover,
The birch is tremulous upon the hill;
On fire-edged wings above the barn a swallow
Is gliding still.

Close as a miser purple mantled evening
Clutches the hoarded treasure of the noon;
The eastern clouds grow white as ripening barley,
Beneath the moon.

All the rich beauty of long vanished ladies,
All unrecorded glory of great kings,
Returns to thrill us in the arrowy splendour
That sunset flings

Across the meadows where the kine are feeding,
By the still churchyard where the dead men lie;
Withdrawing gently as a spirit passing
Into the sky.

All light that men have ever drawn from justice,
All generous fire the brute in man has cost,
Fades to rekindle, like the flame of sunset,
Is never lost.

SUMMER PASSES

SLYLY a wind slips over the hill;
In the heart of a rose a star hangs, still
As an aspen leaf when no wind is blowing:
Like a child that steals off, day is going.

The air is cold as a keen white frost,
Haunting a wild where a lamb is lost.
Gently the rose fades into grey,
Like a crumbling log when fire's away.

Day goes west with the falling dew;
Fleetfoot summer is passing too,
Out of my garden, over the fells,
Into the land where beauty dwells.

As swallows in August on roof and fence,
Warn us summer is hastening hence;
Ripening beauty of petal and wing
Hint to us of our westering.

Even as summer and daylight fade,
You and I, so God us aid,
Out of this pleasant light we know
Into a lovelier light shall go.

REMEMBRANCE

SPRING'S in our wood again,
Subtle and sweet;

With beauty, her sister,
Timid and fleet.

When the snow vanishes
Violets appear;

How can I love them,
Now you are not here?

Do I dream foolishly,
Hoping you live?
Just for one touch of
Your lips I would give
All that men cherish,
Ambition holds dear:

Spring is but winter,
Now you are not here.

O my lost darling,
Forgotten by me,
Winter or summer,
You never shall be.
All it delighteth
My heart to be near,
Reminds me, like Maytime,
That once you were here.

EXILE

GRAND are your western prairies,
On which great clouds come down,
Purple and gold in the sunset,
Beyond the distant town.
E'en to your bitter winters
The saving beauty clings
Of birds that haunt the sunrise,
On white, illusive wings.

Home remains home for ever,
Wherever one may be;
'Tis for the gorse I hunger,
The salt tang of the sea,
The wee, soft bats at twilight,
Weaving their magic spells:
You hear the curlew calling,
But I hear Malvern bells.

Brave is your western crocus,
Give me the daffodils,
In lanes that lead to Ledbury,
Across the Malvern hills.
There sleep the folk who bred me,
The gentle folk and bold;
Whose dust is England's roses,
More precious than her gold.

SEPARATION

Suggested by an inscription on a headstone in Brookside Cemetery, Winnipeg.

SIXTEEN years old and I, a bride,
Lay with a husband by my side.
A year went by and now I know,
Dreaming under the clay and snow,
What it means to be a wife,
To give your life for another's life;
A life that only a day endures,
A heart that flutters and stops with yours.
The neighbours' arms were warm and stout,
Shoulder high they carried me out
Across the garden, down the lane,
Over the prairie, through the rain.
The years will pass and one may come,
Now and then, with lips grown dumb,
To wonder how in my sullen bed
I dream the dreams of the quiet dead.
I do not grudge him money or farm,
I do not grudge him a woman's arm,
Or a child to dance upon his knee,
With eyes that will make him think of me.
The dead grudge nothing to living men:
Ours is a wisdom past your ken.
Heart of my heart, you must not ache,
Only a little, for my sake.

I want you strong to work and live,
To give the best you have to give.
It seems a pity I went away;
I should have been so proud to stay.
Life is so pleasant, death so cold,
When you're seventeen years and six months old.

STARLIGHT

GENTLE as dew at evening,
Or light at earliest dawn.
Gentle as a mother's hand
From her babe's hand withdrawn,
When sleep falls on small eyelids
And breathing quieter grows;
So gently draws the starlight
Across the evening's rose.

Keen are the stars in winter
As swords of heroes old:
But fairer are the stars of May
Above young lambs in fold.
'Twas in the moon of lilacs,
Young day stood at the door,
When gently passed the starlight
From one who woke no more.

THE FIGHTER

HE values no pleasure
This earth can afford
Like the foot in the stirrup,
The hand on the sword,
The surge of the blood
As the steel glitters bright,
While the shrapnel comes over
To left and to right.

With a rush past the barking machine-guns he goes;
There's no joy like the joy that the fighting man
knows.

Now it's steel against steel
And a message is thrown
That tells you his arm
Is as stout as your own.
A twist of your wrist,
The hot spurting of blood,
You glimpse the white face
Of your foe in the mud,

Glaring up through the tangle of hoofs, half
perplexed;
Something clutches your heart as you ride at the
next,

But death leaps inside
The red guard of your steel:
You feel a sharp pang
From your head to your heel.
You know by sure instinct
Your fighting is done;
Never more will you ride
In the wind and the sun;
Yet you shout as the blood gushes, red as a rose;
There's no joy like the joy that the fighting man
knows.

TO AN OLD WOMAN DYING IN HER SLEEP

SHE washed her dishes, blacked her stove,
Swept the floor and dusted a chair;
Glanced in the tins of pepper and clove
And ironed a cap for her thin grey hair:
Then went to bed at half-past nine,
Just as the moon began to shine.

Loudly the bustling robins sing,
Dewy dawn comes cool and sweet.
Passes a spirit on sombre wing,
The sleeper shudders from head to feet.
The old clock ticks, as old clocks will;
The heart and the wrinkled hands are still.

TO IVY ON HER BIRTHDAY

MAY the love of child and husband,
Earthly love and love divine,
As a mother's arms her baby,
Fold you closely, friend of mine,
In your heart's brave rose, dark lady,
When my face no more you see,
Taught by Christ's sublime compassion;
Will you keep a place for me?
Sweet and fresh till Judgment morning,
Keep a tiny place for me.

BALLADE OF LIFE AND DEATH

LADY of Life, and lovely therewithal
As your own summer sky's delicious blue,
You wear your bravest robes at even-fall,
And when the rose is bright with morning dew:
'Tis you I love, to you alone I'm true.
In the tall elm I hear a blackbird sing;
The south wind's blowing, open stands the door.
I'll hie me to the woods and taste the spring,
For once I've rolled away I'll roll no more.

Some men are working on a basement wall,
An old tin-Lizzie, driven by a Jew,
Clatters along, he's going to make a call
On one who owes him money, God knows who;
Let's thank the gods 'tis neither I nor you.
The heat strikes through my awning like a sting:
In the striped hammock for an hour I'll snore,
Then rise and from the bin a bottle bring,
For once I've rolled away I'll roll no more.

Of one length in the grave are short and tall,
The dust that once was brain learns nothing new;
I'd rather be deaf granny in her shawl
Than any Emperor of all the crew
Above whose sepulchres Time writes: You're
through.

Give me my favourite poet and some string
With which to tie that rose I tied before;
Lady of Life, I live and take my fling,
But once I've rolled away I'll roll no more.

Envoy.

Sweetheart, go fetch the fattest, oldest bottle,
Before old Charon's wherry strikes the shore:
We'll kiss beneath the rose, then wet our throttle,
For once we've rolled away we'll roll no more.

MOONRISE

THE haze-dimmed glory of the eastern sky
Thrills to a pure intensity of light
That brightens, as when in the mind a shy,
Half-captured thought breaks into splendid flight,
To float in clear, unclouded majesty,
As now yon witch, in robe of pallid flame,
Transfigures night and dresses every tree
In chastened beauty for some faery game.
So, long ago, within a Grecian cave,
Endymion, sleeping mid his woolly flock,
Felt on his lips the icy kiss that gave
The immortality which worldlings mock;
Thrilled to his heart's red core with passion, then
Was seen no more by eyes of mortal men.

GOOD-BYE

ON the white wings of thought, my beloved, you
come, at a sign, to my side;

On my heart's dearest billow to nestle, like a gull on
the foam of the tide.

Should yours be the sorrows of Mary, the sword
through your heart find a way,

The dust that was I will remember, you were brave,
you were kind in your day.

We sat at life's banquet together, we savoured the
songs and the wine;

Your hand on the harp strings was lighter, your
roses were redder than mine:

For pale were the flowers of my choosing, and sad
were the songs that I sung,

But yours was the dark rose of passion, the splendour
and pride of the young.

Good-bye then for ever, beloved, the word has the
chill of the grave;

What power from the terror of chaos the white star
of being can save?

Though Hell to pale ashes should dwindle, though
Life, the eternal, should die;

Mid the ultimate wreck there must linger one rose,
we have loved, you and I.

TO JOSEPHINE ON HER THIRD ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

CHILD, if the sun were splendid as your hair
I'd build a fane to him and worship there;
For who would not to light and beauty pray,
Bidding them drive all other gods away?

Now at this waking time, when Winter feels
Death in his bones, a subtle tremor steals
Along earth's frozen veins because she knows
The quickening blood that warms her feeds the rose.

Wise Mother Church, older than you or I,
Yet young for ever, fated not to die,
Gives to revive us, like a draught of wine,
The lover's feast of good St. Valentine.

If you will be my Valentine to-morrow,
I from the old magician, Time, will borrow
Years to make up your span of life that we,
For one delightful day, may lovers be.

Live in the present, let the future cling,
Like unformed fruit, to boughs in lusty spring:
Better the morning than the evening dew;
Life is too noble to be hurried through.

TO JOSEPHINE, AGED THREE

SWEET lips, that have not yet love's language
learned,

When your bright curves to mine are lightly
pressed,

More than the wealth of India I have earned,
A haven where my tameless heart may rest.

Bright eyes that have not learned the world's deceit,
Valiant as kind, how can I choose but love you?

Your glance is candid as the impartial sleet,
As clean as yon blue heaven that bends above you.

Gay hands, whose rapid play may life destroy,
Yet bear of cruelty no dusky stain,
Christ of His mercy, teach you to employ
Their wondrous power to heal a grey world's pain.

Swift feet, as restless as the shadow blown
Across the hills by April's gusty weather,
Know that your upward path is thickly sown
With subtle snares and many a flowery tether.

Lips, eyes, hands, feet, enjoy your splendid dawn;
Round Calvary's hill the evening shadows lie.
Duty remains when beauty is withdrawn;
Life's purpose is to teach us how to die.

TO THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER OF WESTMINSTER

PROUD home of England's spirit, guard him well:
He left his little English farm or shop,
Or school perhaps, the boat he used to drive,
Smothered in spray, while wind and wave together
Conspired to drown him, till he knew not whether
The morrow's sun would find him man or live.

If you had asked him why he went abroad—
His dumb lips would have coined no facile phrase:
While in his cheek the mounting colour glowed,
No doubt he would have spat and cursed the Hun,
Or with his spiny humour said that fun
Was to be found along that dismal road.

He learned the freezing horror of the trench,
The flame that made a living man a torch,
The stealthy gust of gas that knocked one silly.
Then in the corpse-encumbered mud he placed
A neatly fashioned sign-post, duly graced
With this inscription: "Deah ole Piccadilly."

Nameless, he sleeps among resounding names;
Unknown yet never king so known as he:
Above his head no wind-blown poppies dance.
As the relentless centuries go by,
From that immortal earth will rise a cry;
This bit of England is for ever France.

THE ANSWER

BRAVE Rose of Christmas-tide,
Sweet is thy breath;
Though the keen scent divide
Life from Death.

Pure flame of perfect love
Burning for me;
Grace, mercy, peace above
Earth's misery.

Small hand of infant King,
Outstretched to bless;
How to thy cradle bring
My nothingness?

Swiftly the answer runs,
Clear as the dew,
Who loves my little ones,
Loveth me too.

REVELATION

IN violation of natural law
No oxen kneel in the barton's straw;
But I, with a child ghost by my knee,
May surely fancy they kneel for me.

Within the round of the sky's blue marge,
No shepherds leave their fleecy charge;
But I, with a dead wife's hand in mine,
May see the Star o'er the stable shine.

No Kings with their tinkling camel bells
Ride out of the East, where mystery dwells;
But I, who gifts to a loved shrine bring,
May kneel at the feet of an infant King.

The Crown of Thorns is a fable old,
Kings of this earth are crowned with gold;
But they who the thorn have worn and won,
Doubt not the crowning of Mary's son.

WHITE MAGIC

SHE works beneath a white oak,
In the blue June weather;
Embroidering the love runes
That bind two hearts together.

I see her in the morning,
When mist is on the sea;
And when golden as linden bloom
At evening lies the lea.

But whether she goes up the glen
Or whether she goes down,
I know not, nor shall ever know
Till I see Asgard¹ town.

¹Asgard, the town of the dead in Norse mythology. Runes were of two kinds, bad runes that brought ill luck, and good runes that brought happiness.

QUESTION

I SHALL be one with sleep and never know
When the first violet greets the April light;
Nor see the spectral blossoms of the snow
Make beautiful the grey November night.
I shall receive within my quiet place
Plenary absolution day by day,
For all my sins of flesh, until no trace
Remains of what must wholly pass away.
Then when my earthly has to earth returned,
And kind oblivion has erased my name;
What of the soaring flame that brightly burned,
Driving the sullen clay to grasp at fame?
Can that which is not blood nor brain nor breath,
Yield to the awful alchemy of Death?